

Testimony for Public Hearing
Appropriations Committee,
February 23, 2017

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Marcea F. Koffsky, TESTIMONY on HB 7027, February 23, 2017

Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Marcea Koffsky and I am a registered voter in Norwalk. I am testifying regarding HB 7027, An Act Concerning the State Budget. **I am particularly concerned about the proposed "consolidation" cut to the Regional Mental Health Boards, which would in fact *eliminate those entities*. *The Regional Mental Health Boards provide services to the people and the state of Connecticut that vital and that are not performed by any other organization(s)*.**

I am a small part of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board and a Catchment Area Council member. Let me tell you what our Regional Board has been up to in the last few weeks: we have been testifying at the LOB.

There are two bills, one before the State Insurance Committee and one before the Public Health Committee that came directly from the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board's recent legislative forums. The issues presented in these bills came directly from the SWRMHB's needs assessment and reports written in the last year about the psychiatric workforce and our community's ability to access care.

- The **insurance bill** is about providing insurance coverage (public and private) for peer support services and for case management
- The **public health bill** is about creating a state task force to make specific recommendations to deal with the shortages in the behavioral health workforce. This bill drew favorable public testimony not only from all 5 RMHBs and some private practitioners, but also from the CT Council for Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, the CT Hospital Association, the CT Nurses Association, the CT Psychiatry Society, and other groups. 100% of the testimony was in favor of

getting to work on this problem now. The committee realized that this issue is critical and asked Margaret Watt, Executive Director of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board to provide names to help constitute the task force.

If these bills get enacted into law (and it looks like one most definitely will and one possibly will), that will represent the culmination of the work of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board from:

- (1) listening at the grassroots level to**
- (2) gathering data to quantify issues to**
- (3) making policy recommendations and then**
- (4) advocating and lobbying to get them implemented.**

Should you eliminate the small amount of funding that supports the Regional Mental Health Boards, we will LOSE all of this. We will lose all these abilities!

In addition, THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT WILL LOSE:

Community-based evaluation of the state's \$700 million behavioral health system.

The Regional Mental Health Boards (RMHBs) provide independent, external assessment of state-funded programs. We work at the grassroots, community, and regional levels to give feedback on service provision, the impact of program and budget changes, and emerging needs.

Vital federal dollars (\$23M) that support many of CT's behavioral health programs and initiatives.

The RMHBs coordinate with our community partners to collect regional information and develop priorities for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Our needs assessments are required in the state application for federal funding.

The voice of our communities. The RMHBs provide a structure for grassroots engagement via our Catchment Area Councils(CACs), where people in recovery, their families, and community providers work together on issues of common concern. We work to empower people and families living with mental health and addiction issues, helping them to advocate effectively for improved services for themselves and others.

Practical, cost-effective solutions that educate & empower. Whether it is via our needs assessments, recommendations reports, community conversations, awareness and wellness programs, trainings, or legislative advocacy, the RMHBs provide practical tools to help our communities as well as the state to find solutions that work. "The Best Bargain in the System" (quote from a DMHAS official) The 5 RMHBs represent an impressive return on investment.

The \$584,000 in state funding to the RMHBs represents 0.08% of the DMHAS budget and helps bring in \$23 million in federal funding.

As the state privatizes more services in the next couple of years, it will be more important than ever to have an outside organization that brings community members together to review the services and make recommendations from the community's perspective.

For this and all the reasons stated above, I ask you to please consider fully funding the Regional Mental Health Boards. I thank you very much for supporting services to people with mental health and/or substance use disorders.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.

Marcea F. Koffsky